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ABSTRACT

Intended to help institutions place their entering students in regular freshman English composition courses, the Test of Standard Written English (TSWE) is most useful to colleges that also offer alternate courses designed to improve students' understanding of the material explored by the test. The Test of Standard Written English assesses students' levels of achievement in standard written English. By "standard written English" is meant the conventionalized, edited language of most college textbooks and the language in which students will probably be asked to write most papers in college. The test does not attempt to assess the ability of students to write "creatively" or to communicate informally as they would with friends. The Test of Standard Written English does not ask students to do any writing. Rather, it presents a total of 50 multiple-choice questions of 2 basic types. Research comparing the scores of students on essays and multiple-choice questions shows that performance on questions of each type correlates highly with the ability to write standard written English. Sample questions as well as some preliminary findings are included in the document. (Author/DEP)

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The Test of Standard Written English

A Preliminary Report

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The Test of Standard Written English - a preliminary report

Intended to help institutions place their entering students in regular freshman English composition courses, the Test of Standard Written English (TSWE) is most useful to colleges that also offer alternate courses designed to improve students' understanding of the material explored by the test.

Through this report, we wish to share with you and your colleagues a description of the test and some preliminary findings concerning it. The sample test questions given on pages 8-10 can help you judge whether the test is related to your instructional objectives and, therefore, likely to be useful for placement.

We hope you will read this report thoughtfully to determine if the weaknesses the test might point out in your students' ability to use standard written English would be a handicap to them in the regular freshman English composition course at your institution.

If you would like to receive an inspection copy of the test or to discuss how you might evaluate the test at your institution, please contact the College Board regional office in your area. You'll find the addresses and phone numbers for the regional offices on the back cover of this report.

What the test is like

The Test of Standard Written English assesses students' levels of achievement in standard written English. By "standard written English" is meant the conventionalized, edited language of most college textbooks and the language in which students will probably be asked to write most papers in college. The test does not attempt to assess the ability of students to write "creatively" or to communicate informally as they would with friends.

The Test of Standard Written English does not ask students to do any writing. Rather, it presents a total of 50 multiple-choice questions of 2 basic types. Research comparing the scores of students on essays and multiple-choice questions shows that performance on questions of each type correlates highly with the ability to write standard written English.

At its simplest level, the test deals with such matters as agreement of subject and verb (John and Mary walks.). At more sophisticated levels, the questions ask about such matters as the logic of comparisons (Eloise drives faster than her neighbor's car.) and the appropriate subordination or coordination of ideas within a sentence (Maria will return to San Francisco next year, and she was born there.). Each writing problem is presented within the context of a sentence. The formal terminology of grammar is not tested. Spelling and capitalization are not asked about in any of the questions, and in only a few of the questions will punctuation marks, such as apostrophes or semicolons, be important in arriving at the answer.

To give you an idea of what the test attempts to assess, several sample questions appear below. These are all questions that have appeared on a form of the test; that is, they have appeared in tests taken by some students who may be entering your college now. The sample questions have been chosen specifically to represent various levels of difficulty and to illustrate particular writing problems. The writing problems illustrated are only a very few among the many that appear on the test and the problems that appear on the test are only some of the many that must be dealt with by people when they write.

The sample questions represent three of the many kinds of writing problems tested on the Test of Standard Written English. Although each of the two basic types of questions is presented to students in a separate section on the test, the types have been mixed together in these sample questions and grouped instead by writing problem to give you an idea of the variety of ways in which particular writing problems can be tested.

One type of test question asks the student only to recognize writing that does not follow the conventions of standard written English. Each question of this type consists of a sentence with four words or phrases underlined and lettered. The student is asked to choose the one underlined word or phrase that must be changed in order to make the sentence acceptable in standard written English. If the student thinks the sentence is acceptable as it is (and some sentences are), he or she can choose the fifth option, "No Error." This type of question effectively tests some of the basic conventions of standard written English - the use of appropriate tense sequences, the agreement of pronoun with antecedent, the maintenance of parallel structure, and the use of appropriate diction, for example.

The other type of test question requires the student not only to identify unacceptable usage, but also to choose the best way of phrasing a sentence. For questions of this type, a part of a sentence or an entire sentence is underlined. Beneath the sentence are five ways of writing the underlined part; choice (A) is always the same as the underlined part. The student is asked to choose the answer that

produces the most effective sentence - clear and exact, without awkwardness or ambiguity. Because many elements of a sentence, and even the entire sentence, can be asked about in questions of this type, such questions can present to the student for correction not only easily corrected errors in standard written English but also more complex faults in the logic or structure of a given sentence.

Below are the directions for these two types of questions. Following the directions are a group of 12 sample questions and an answer key. When looking at the sample questions, keep in mind that a particular question can often test for more than one writing problem. Also remember that the number of these sample questions a student might answer correctly does not reliably indicate how he or she would score on the 50-item test.

Directions: The following sentences contain problems in grammar, usage, diction (choice of words), and idiom.

Some sentences are correct.
No sentence contains more than one error.

You will find that the error, if there is one, is underlined and lettered. Assume that all other elements of the sentence are correct and cannot be changed. In choosing answers, follow the requirements of standard written English.

If there is an error, select the one underlined part that must be changed in order to make the sentence correct, and blacken the corresponding space on the answer sheet.

If there is no error, mark answer space E.

EXAMPLES:

SAMPLE ANSWERS

I. He spoke bluntly (A) and angrily (B) to we (C) spectators. (D) No error (E)

I. ⓐⓑ●ⓓⓔ

II. He works (A) every day (B) so that he would (C) become financially (D) independent in his old age. No error (E)

II. ●ⓑⓒⓓⓔ

Directions: In each of the following sentences, some part of the sentence or the entire sentence is underlined. Beneath each sentence you will find five ways of phrasing the underlined part. The first of these repeats the original; the other four are different. If you think the original is better than any of the alternatives, choose answer A; otherwise choose one of the others. Select the best version and blacken the corresponding space on your answer sheet.

This is a test of correctness and effectiveness of expression. In choosing answers, follow the requirements of standard written English; that is, pay attention to grammar, choice of words, sentence construction, and punctuation. Choose the answer that produces the most effective sentence -- clear and exact, without awkwardness or ambiguity. Do not make a choice that changes the meaning of the original sentence.

EXAMPLES:

SAMPLE ANSWERS

I. Caroline is studying music because she has always wanted to become it.

(A) it (B) one of them (C) a musician
(D) one in music (E) this

I. ⓐⓑ●ⓓⓔ

II. Because Mr. Thomas was angry, he spoke in a loud voice.

(A) he spoke (B) and speaking
(C) and he speaks (D) as he spoke
(E) he will be speaking

II. ●ⓑⓒⓓⓔ

Sample questions for the Test of Standard Written English

Questions testing subject-verb agreement

1. Some laws that are supposed to protect (A) women from (B) exploitation has been used (C) instead (D) to repress them. No error (E)

2. Not to be (A) ignored as (B) part of the problem of describing American dialects are (C) the question of social and economic influences on (D) linguistic patterns. No error (E)

3. The characteristics of the people in Langston Hughes's writing are as identical as the people he lived with in Harlem.

   (A) are as identical as
   (B) is identical to
   (C) are identical as those of
   (D) is the same as
   (E) are the same as those of

4. Neither the contractor nor the architect were (A) willing to estimate when (B) the work would be (C) completed because (D) each suspected that a strike might occur. No error (E)

Questions testing sentence structure

5. During the summer, the children in the neighborhood playing in the spray from open hydrants.

   (A) playing in the spray from open hydrants
   (B) play in the spray from open hydrants
   (C) play in the spray while having opened the hydrants
   (D) playing in the spray when having opened the hydrants
   (E) play in the spray, and the hydrants have been opened

6. Booker T. Washington founded Tuskegee Institute, also writing "Up From Slavery."

(A) Booker T. Washington founded Tuskegee Institute, also writing "Up From Slavery."
(B) Writing "Up From Slavery," Booker T. Washington founded Tuskegee Institute.
(C) The author of "Up From Slavery," Tuskegee Institute was also founded by Booker T. Washington.
(D) Booker T. Washington, who wrote "Up From Slavery," founded Tuskegee Institute.
(E) Booker T. Washington wrote "Up From Slavery," founding Tuskegee Institute in addition.

7. Frank decided to visit the area because he wanted to see the Navajo craftsmen at their work.

(A) area because he wanted to see
(B) area, it was for seeing
(C) area, he wanted to see
(D) area because of seeing
(E) area for seeing

8. The city needs more public housing, taxes (A) must be increased (B) in order to finance (C) the construction. (D) No error (E)

Questions testing pronoun agreement

9. Old oil refineries are generally heavy polluters because of their building them when technology was still relatively crude.

(A) because of their building them
(B) because they were built
(C) insofar as they had been built
(D) inasmuch as they built them
(E) for such have been built

10. During the Depression people seldom (A) went to plays or concerts because (B) they had little (C) money to spend on it. (D) No error (E)

11. All of the (A) weather stations participating (B) in the experiment agreed to (C) report their (D) findings to a central clearing house. No error (E)

12. Because of (A) the popularity of alligator shoes and handbags, conservationists fear (B) it may (C) (D) soon disappear. No error (E)

Answer key for sample questions

1.	C	5.	B	9.	B
2.	C	6.	D	10.	D
3.	E	7.	A	11.	E
4.	A	8.	A	12.	C

TSWE scores

Raw scores on the TSWE are converted to a two-digit scale with a range from 20 to 80. The value of the test is in its special capacity to make distinctions at the lower end of the scale, a fact that is directly related to the intended use of the test. Since the test is not intended to make distinctions among students with a better-than-average command of standard written English, it is constructed in such a way that distinctions at the upper end of the score scale are not possible, and, therefore, the maximum reported score is 60.

Table 1 relates the reported scores for a typical edition of the TSWE to the number of items answered correctly (recall that the test has 50 items in all). Please note that Table 1 assumes that all items were attempted and that the "Total right" column has not been corrected for guessing (subtracting a fraction of the number of wrong answers from the total right). A student guessing at random on all 50 questions would on the average guess 12 or 13 correctly, even with no knowledge of the questions.

Table 1. How TSWE scaled scores relate to total right

Total right	TSWE reported score
46-50	60+
42	55
38	50
35	45
31	40
27	35
23	30
20	25
16	20

Table 1 provides a means for estimating what particular TSWE score level may be reasonably associated with a general level of competence. For example, a TSWE score of 33 corresponds to answering correctly about half of the items on the test.

We can express the performance of particular students taking TSWE in relation to scores of college-bound students who took the SAT in 1973-74. As you will see in Table 2 below, a TSWE score of 55 places the student higher than 83 percent of the college-bound students who took the SAT in 1973-74; a score of 50 ranks the student higher than 66 percent; and a score of 45 is higher than the scores earned by 50 percent of the students in this group.

Table 2. Percentile ranks of scores on the Test of Standard Written English (For college-bound students)

Score	Percentile rank
60+	96
55	83
50	66
45	50
40	34
35	20
30	10
25	4
20	--
Mean	44
Standard deviation	10

These percentile ranks are estimated for all juniors and seniors who took the SAT in 1973-74.

The reliability estimate for TSWE is .87 and the standard error of measurement is approximately 4 scaled score points. Thus, we can say that the chances are two out of three that the observed TSWE score will lie in a band the limits of which are four points above and four points below the student's true score. For example, if a student's true score is 40, the reported score for the student will be between 36 and 44 in 2 out of 3 cases.

Preliminary data obtained at 14 colleges

In 1974, a special grading study was conducted at 14 colleges in which TSWE scores and grades in regular freshman English composition courses were collected. A summary of the results for the 10 colleges that provided the most data is shown in Table 3. The data presented are from a specific and not necessarily representative set of colleges. You should recognize that the table contains influences of their individual practices in grading, placement, and instruction. Please also note that Table 3 does not represent national norms or even a representative selection of colleges. Rather, it represents only the data obtained from 10 of the colleges that volunteered for and followed through in the grading study.

In Table 3, the colleges are listed in order of their average TSWE scores for students in regular freshman English. In College A, for example, regular freshman English composition students have both a high mean TSWE score (49.8) and a high mean grade average (2.8) (based on the 0 to 4 grade point system). Fifty-seven percent of the regular freshman English composition students scored 50 or above on the TSWE. By contrast, in College I, only 24 percent of the regular freshman English composition students scored 50 or above on the TSWE. However, the grade average for College I (2.8) is the same as that for College A even though the mean TSWE score for College I is only 43.3. Undoubtedly, course content at these colleges differs significantly as do grading practices (severe to easy) and placement strategies. For

example, College A places certain students in its regular freshman English composition course and prescribes special instruction for others, while College I offers no special instruction and places all students in the regular freshman English composition course. In some of the 10 colleges, regular freshman English composition courses may provide considerable instruction in the kinds of English usage included in TSWE.

This table is presented primarily to show the considerable range of test score and grading data for a number of colleges and to suggest ways in which you might display specific data for your college. Since the curriculum and students of individual schools may differ in crucial ways from those in the sample, we suggest that you conduct studies that will allow you to develop norms for TSWE for use in placing your own students in freshman English courses.

Table 3. Data from 10 of the colleges in the grading study

College	Mean TSWE score/ grade*	TSWE score range	Number of cases	Percent by TSWE score range	Percentage receiving each grade				
					A	B	C	D	F
A	49.8	50-	399	57	32	43	22	2	1
	2.8	40-49	241	34	6	41	43	8	2
		20-39	65	9	6	31	48	15	
B	49.7	50-	99	54	15	51	33		
	2.3	40-49	63	35	2	17	62	14	5
		20-39	20	11		10	20	50	20
C	46.6	50-	134	42	16	54	25	4	
	2.3	40-49	113	35	5	31	51	8	4
		20-39	72	23	1	12	47	24	15
D	46.3	50-	147	36	34	50	16		
	2.9	40-49	163	40	12	58	30		
		20-39	96	24	7	54	34	4	
E	46.2	50-	58	41	34	48	16		2
	2.8	40-49	50	35	12	38	50		
		20-39	34	24	15	18	65		3
F	45.2	50-	114	33	24	49	19	6	2
	2.7	40-49	139	40	12	53	29	4	1
		20-39	93	27	10	35	46	4	4
G	44.3	50-	37	26	27	46	24		3
	2.5	40-49	61	43	13	38	46	2	2
		20-39	43	30	5	26	49	5	16
H	43.6	50-	131	31	16	48	25	3	8
	2.0	40-49	139	33	3	26	47	9	15
		20-39	153	36	2	12	42	13	31
I	43.3	50-	145	24	41	42	15	1	
	2.8	40-49	238	40	24	45	24	5	3
		20-39	208	35	12	38	38	9	2
J	42.2	50-	66	27	27	50	23		
	2.3	40-49	80	32	9	42	38	5	6
		20-39	102	41		16	55	22	7

*A=4, B=3, C=2, and D=1

Suggested analyses

To show you one way to display and determine the relation of students' TSWE scores to their course grades in regular freshman English composition courses, we have included on the next page a graph of such results at a mythical institution. The diagram was drawn after the following steps were taken:

1. Instructors indicated the final letter grade (A=highest, F=failing) for each student in the regular freshman English composition course who took the TSWE.

2. In each of the grade groups, students' TSWE scores were put in rank order and the number of students earning each particular score was tallied.

3. The number and percentage of students earning each grade and the mean (or average) scaled score for each grade group were recorded at the bottom of the figure.

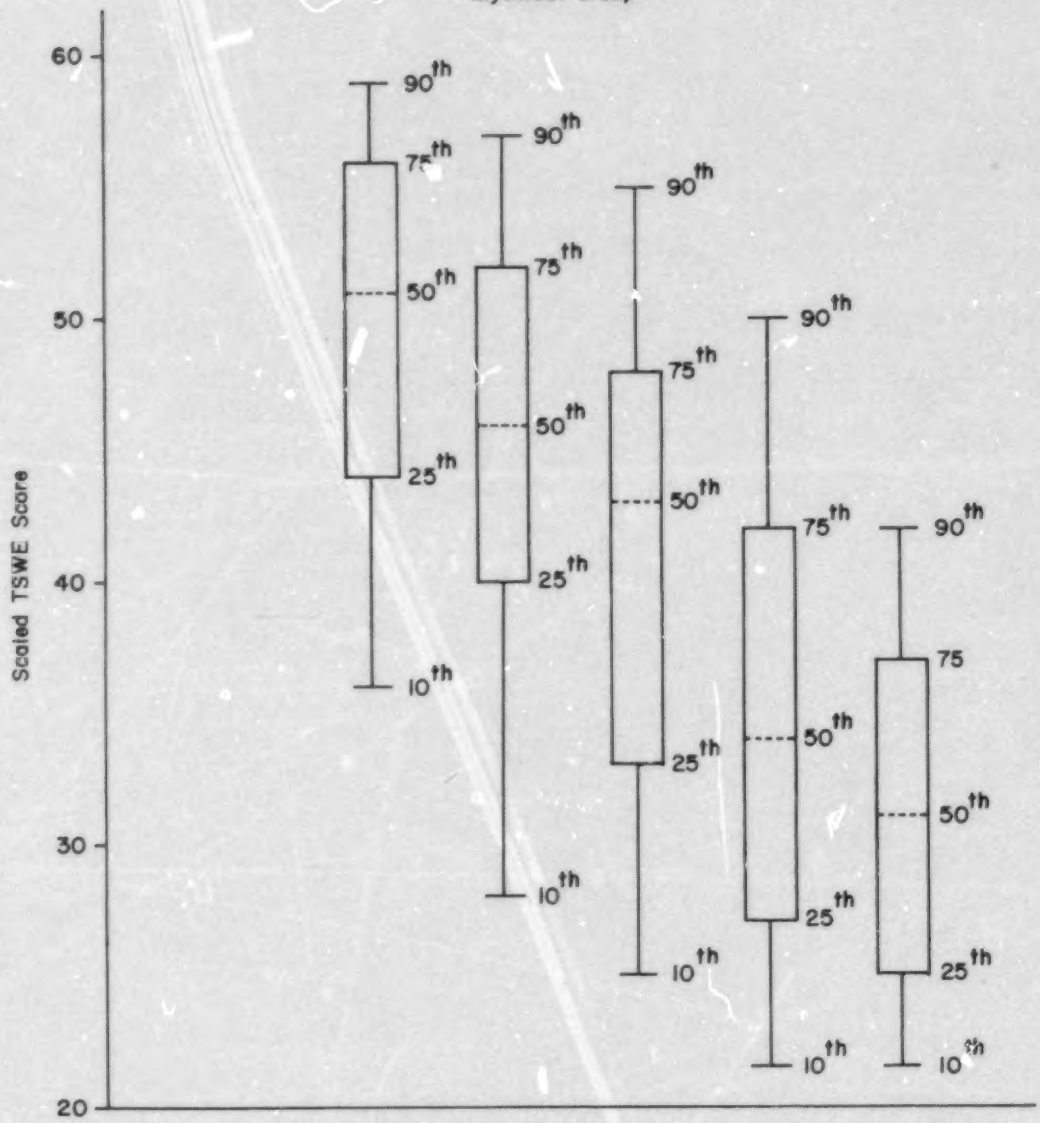
4. The 10th, 25th, 50th, 75th, and 90th percentile ranks for each grade group were determined.

5. These points were plotted on the figure.

In the example, the 50th percentile (the broken horizontal line) for students who earned B falls at approximately 46; the range from the 25th to the 75th percentile (represented by the boxed area) is from scaled scores 40 to 52; and, finally, 80 percent of the cases (between the 10th and 90th percentiles) fall between scaled scores 28 and 57.

On page 19 you will find a shell on which you may graph the results at your institution. For other models for analysis of test results, please

TSWE Scaled Score Distribution by Final Regular Freshman English Composition Course Grades
Spring Semester, 1975
Mythical Group



	A	B	C	D	E
Mean	49.1	45.0	41.8	35.5	32.1
Number of Students	130	383	211	30	21
Percentage Earning Each Grade*	16.8	49.4	27.2	3 9	2.7

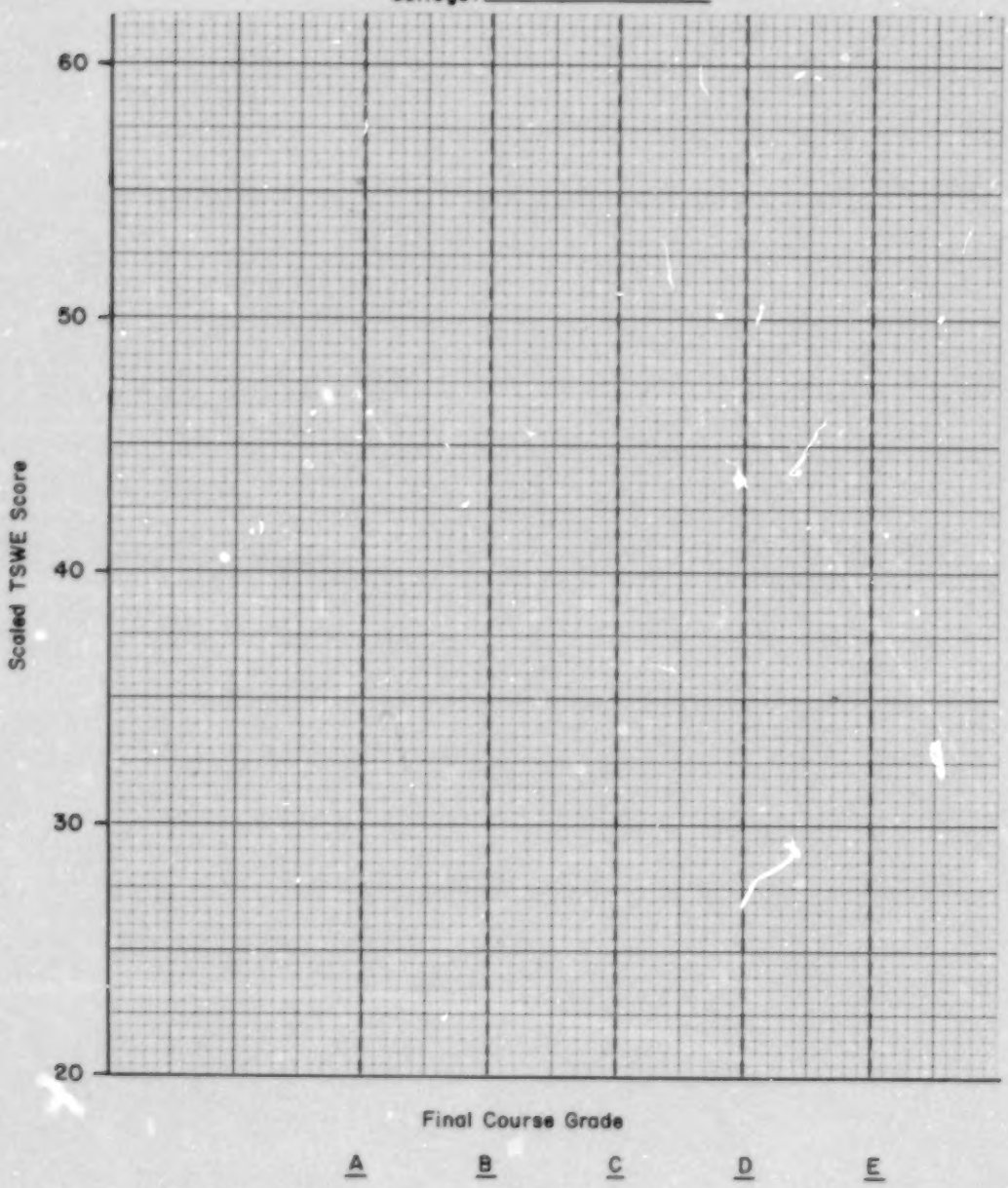
*The base for computing the "percentage earning each grade" is the number for whom final course grades were reported.

see Warren Willingham's book College Placement and Exemption (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1974). Copies of this book (hardcover: $6.95, order code 292720; paperbound: $4.95, order code 292721) may be ordered from College Board Publication Orders, Box 2815, Princeton, New Jersey 08540.

TSWE Scaled Score Distribution by Final Regular Freshman English Composition Course Grades

_____ Semester, 197_

College: _____



Mean

Number of Students

Percentage Earning Each Grade*

*The base for computing the "percentage earning each grade" is the number for whom final course grades were reported.

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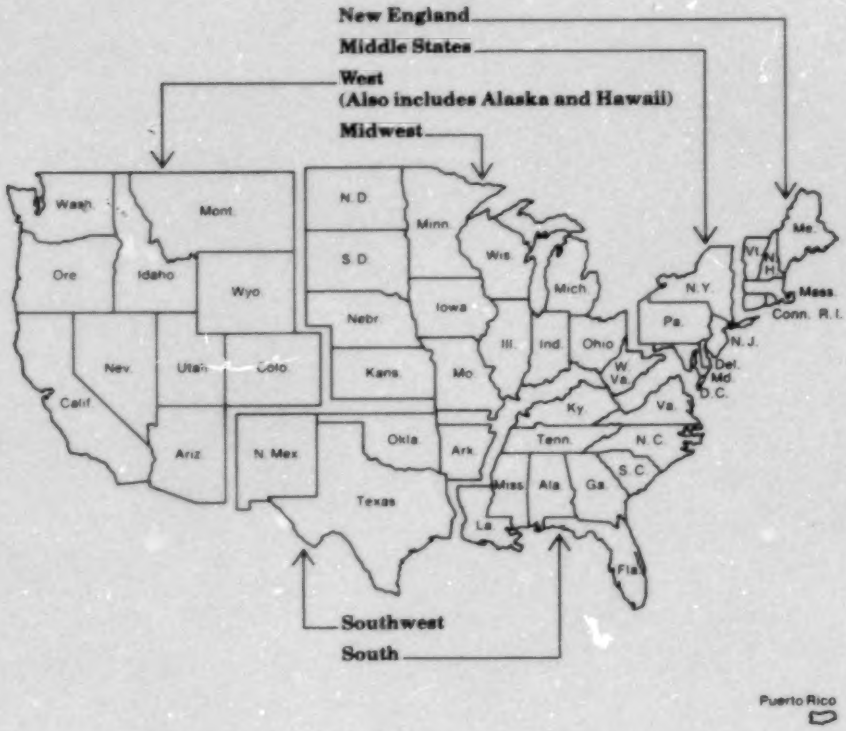

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